

City Planning Department



Memo

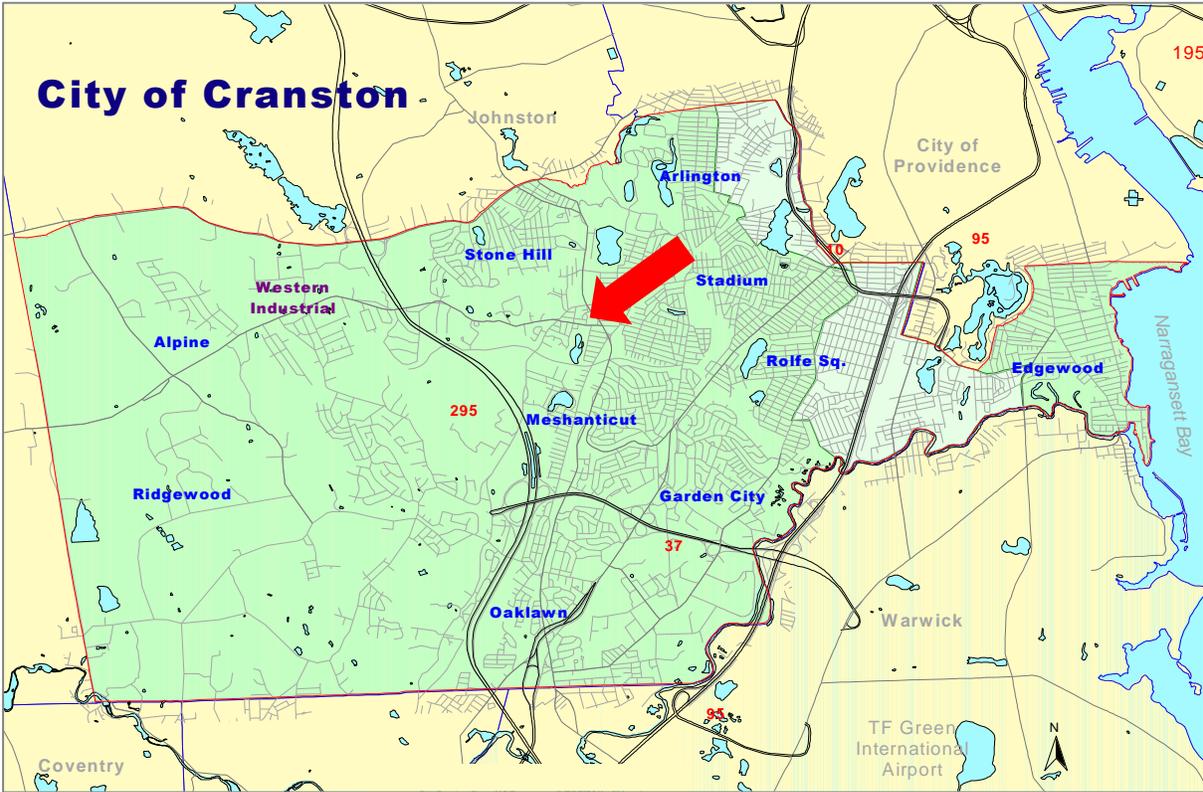
To: Cranston City Plan Commission
From: Joshua Berry, AICP, Senior Planner
Date: October 30, 2020
Re: Variance Application for 148 Atwood Avenue (AP 12, Lot 196)

Owner / App: CGRI Cranston Atwood, LLC
Location: 148 Atwood Avenue - AP 12, Lot 196
Zone: C-2 (Neighborhood Business)
FLU: Highway Commercial / Services

DIMENSIONAL VARIANCE REQUEST:

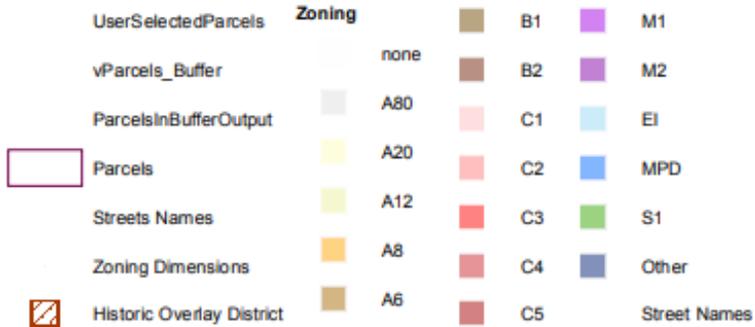
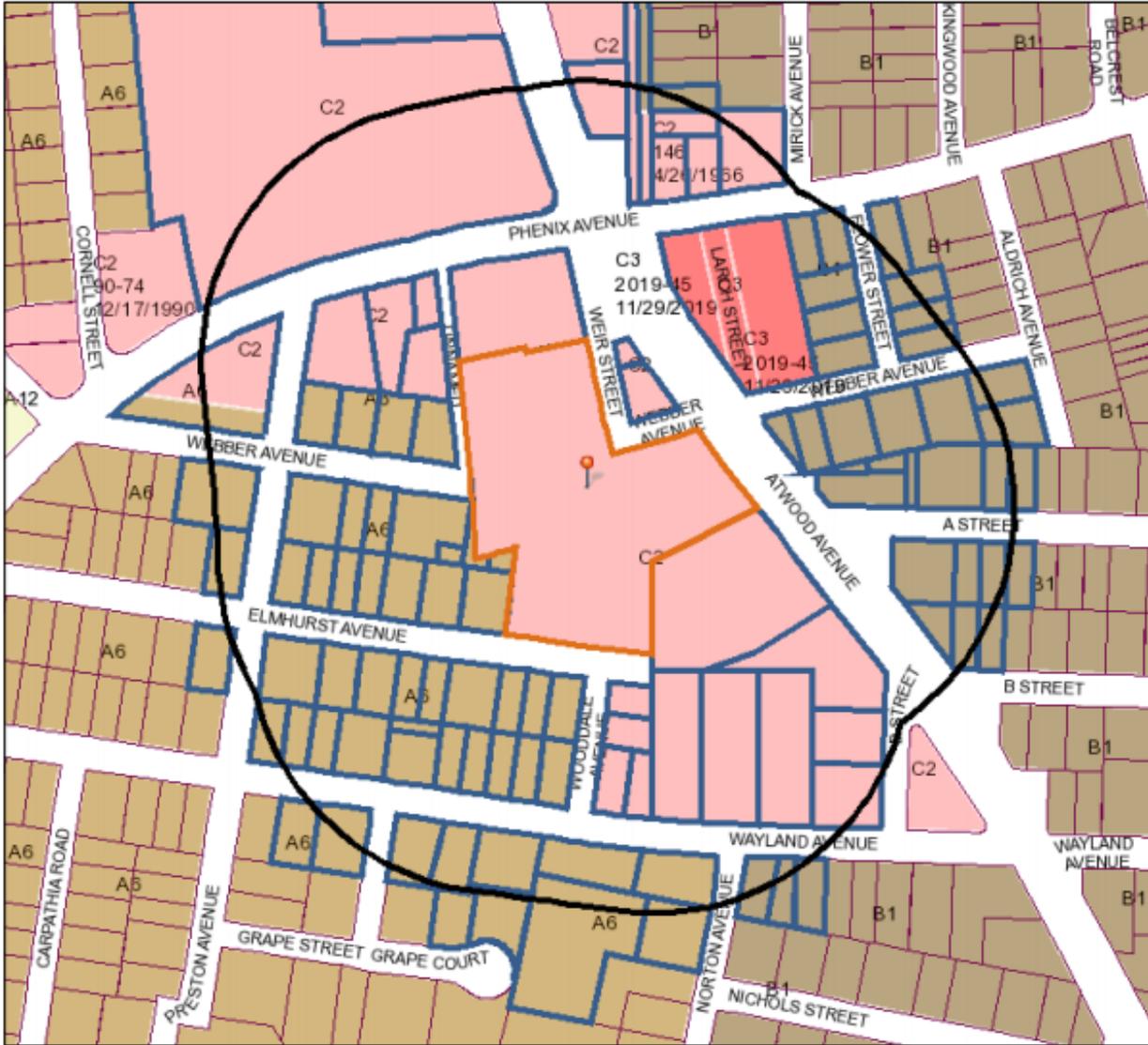
1. To allow additional signage on an existing freestanding sign. [17.72.010(3) – Signs]

LOCATION MAP



ZONING MAP

(subject parcel marked in orange, 400 - foot radius marked in black)



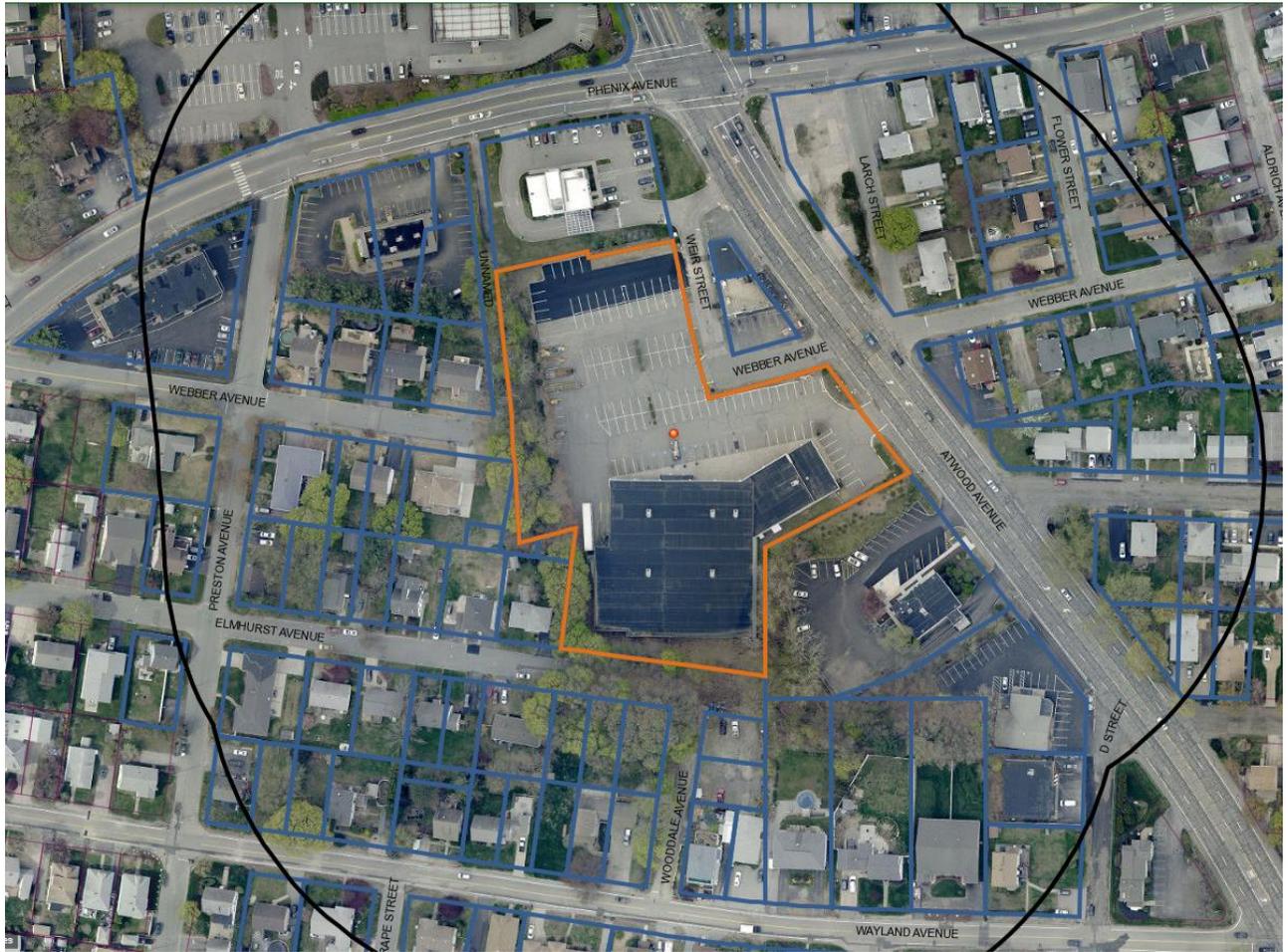
This map/data/geospatial product is not the product of a Professional Land Survey. It was created for general reference, informational, planning and guidance use and is not a legally authoritative source as to location of natural or manmade features. Proper interpretation of this data may require the assistance of appropriate professional services. The City of Cranston makes no warranties, expressed or implied related to the spatial accuracy, reliability, completeness or currentness of this map/data.



City of Cranston

NEIGHBORHOOD AERIAL

(subject parcel marked in orange, 400 - foot radius marked in black)



STREET VIEW (facing west)



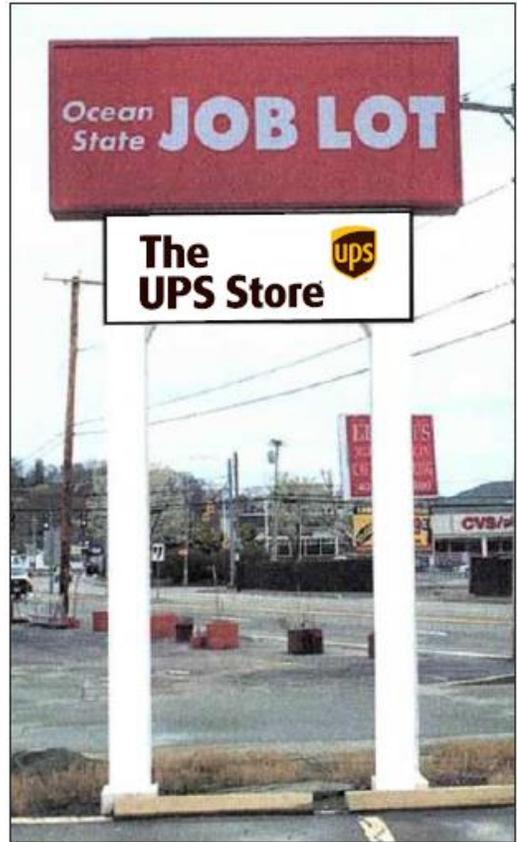
AERIAL CLOSE UP



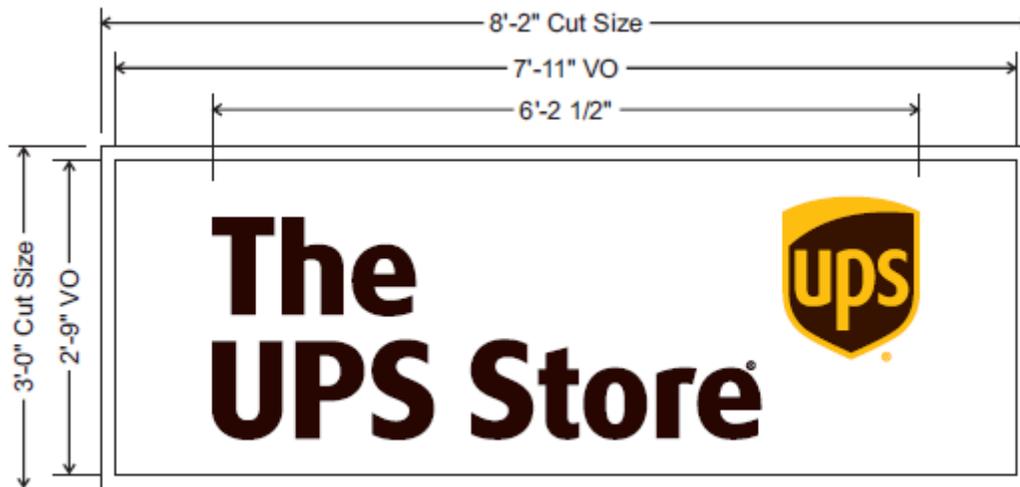
3-D AERIAL VIEW (facing southwest)



EXISTING vs. PROPOSED



SIGN DETAILS



"T" - 10-1/4" / "e" - 7-5/8" / Shield - 17-1/8"

FINDINGS OF FACT:

1. The applicant is requesting a variance to allow a 49 ft² (24.5 ft² on each side) addition to an existing 96.26 ft² (48.125 SF per side) freestanding sign that is 17.54' high at 148 Atwood Avenue. The existing freestanding sign is for the anchor tenant (Job Lot) of the existing building. The proposed sign is for UPS/the UPS Store in the existing building.
2. The existing freestanding sign is larger than 25 ft² maximum per C-2 zoning standards. The Zoning Board of Review approved additional signage on 7/9/03.
3. The applicant submitted two proposed wall signs in addition to the addition to the freestanding sign as part of sign permit application #116830. The wall signs did not require relief and were issued permits on 9/9/20.
4. The applicant's justification for seeking signage relief for this property reads: *"Due to the nature of the subject property, and existing building, relief is needed to ensure adequate signage is present for commercial retail tenants both at the street and on the existing building."*
5. With freestanding signs commonly found for businesses on Atwood Avenue, the addition to the existing freestanding sign would not be out of character or injurious to the area.
6. City Code Section 17.72.010 regulates the signage for C-1 and C-2 zones. It does NOT accommodate for additional signage for multitenant properties. Therefore, in this instance, The UPS Store would not be allowed ANY amount of freestanding signage as the Job Lot sign has already surpassed the maximum permitted under zoning. The absence of a provision to accommodate for multitenant properties results in a competitive disadvantage by necessitating zoning relief for businesses to enjoy similar rights held by others on the same property.
7. The Comprehensive Plan does not explicitly give guidance for sign requests. However, speaking to economic development strategies to commercial areas East of I-295, the Comprehensive Plan states, "Strengthen controls on high impact uses, and increase application of signage, parking, and landscaping regulations" (p. 24). Staff does not find that the application is in direct conflict with this guidance, but due to Code flaws described in Findings of Fact #6, would hold that denial of the request would be antithetical to the City's economic development goals and business-friendly policies.

PLANNING ANALYSIS:

The applicant is requesting relief to install a 49 ft² (24.5 ft² on each side) addition to an existing 96.26 ft² (48.125 SF per side) freestanding sign. The existing pylon sign was granted relief by the ZBR on 7/9//03 when the site used to be occupied by Benny's. The Ocean State Job Lot has now occupied the majority of the building, and The UPS Store has moved into the smaller tenant space and is seeking representation on the pylon sign.

Staff finds the request to be reasonable based on the existing conditions, the character of Atwood Avenue and the nature of the request. The width of the proposed sign is stipulated by the width of the existing pylon sign. It would be possible for the applicant to reduce the height of the sign, but staff does not find that it is particularly large or out of character with the Job Lot sign or other nearby freestanding signs on Atwood Avenue.

The City has a long history of struggling with its outdated sign ordinance. Section 17.72.010 regulates the signage for C-1 and C-2 zones. It does NOT accommodate for additional signage for multitenant properties. Therefore, in this instance, The UPS Store would not be allowed ANY amount of freestanding signage as the Job Lot sign has already surpassed the maximum permitted under zoning. The absence of a provision to accommodate for multitenant properties results in a competitive disadvantage by necessitating zoning relief for businesses to enjoy similar rights held by others on the same property.

Staff has reviewed the Comprehensive Plan and found the Land Use Plan section, under Eastern Commercial Development, recommends that the City “Strengthen controls on high impact uses, and the application of signage, parking and landscaping regulations should be increased” (p. 24). However, staff does not find that the application is in direct conflict with this guidance, but due to Code flaws described in Findings of Fact #6, would hold that denial of the request would be antithetical to the City’s economic development goals and business-friendly policies. The denial of the request does not appear to serve any other policy or goal of the Comprehensive Plan, so staff finds that the request is not inconsistent with the Comprehensive Plan.

RECOMMENDATION:

Due to the applicant’s proposal to work with the existing freestanding sign, and finding that the proposed sign would not be injurious or out of character with the surrounding commercial area, staff recommends that the Plan Commission forward a **positive recommendation** on this application to the Zoning Board of Review.